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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ATHENS 002324

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CY](#) [GR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE/TURKEY: BABACAN VISIT "CAUTIOUSLY POSITIVE"

Classified By: A/Political Counselor Jeff Hovenier for 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) GOG officials positively portrayed Turkish FM Babacan's December 3 - 5 visit to Athens as an "important step forward." Although there was no movement "on the core issues," Babacan and FM Bakoyannis announced additional confidence building measures (CBMs) that would require greater mil-to-mil cooperation (and potentially increase NRF commitments). Furthermore, the Greeks felt they were able to press their agenda with Babacan and "be heard." The agenda was extensive, covering EU accession, Cyprus, illegal immigration, the Aegean, minority issues in Greece and Turkey, the Balkans, Terrorism - PKK, and French President Sarkozy's proposal for a Mediternion. Septel from ConGe-----

¶2. (C) A/Political Counselor met 12/7 with MFA Turkey Deputy Director Boutos and Aegean Officer Ghikas to discuss Turkish FM Babacan's December 3 - 5 visit to Greece. Babacan met with Greek President Papoulias, PM Karamanlis, Parliamentary Speaker Sioufas, Economy and Finance Minister Alogoskoufis, and FM Bakoyannis.

¶3. (C) From the Greek MFA perspective it was a "good visit." Although there was "no progress on the core issues" -- such as the delineation of the continental shelf or a change in the Turkish position that a Greek extension of territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles is a "casus belli" -- the Greeks were pleased with the visit and the discussion. Specifically, they were able to "express clearly" Greek positions to Babacan and "get a good hearing." Readout provided by the Greek MFA of specific issues on the agenda follows.

EU Accession - Cyprus

¶4. (C) Babacan briefed the Greeks on Turkish efforts to meet EU requirements. He said Turkey is doing its best to "be on track" despite skepticism from some in Europe about Turkey's European perspective. He thanked the Greeks for their support for Turkish EU membership, but asked that this support be "even more vocal." FM Bakoyannis responded that Greece stands by its position of support for Turkish EU accession, and is pressing for this within EU decision-making councils. However, it is easier for Greece to support Turkey as Turkey meets EU requirements. In this context, she raised the need for Turkey to meet its commitments related to the

Additional Protocol. Babacan responded that this is linked to Cyprus.

¶5. (C) Discussion of Cyprus was surprisingly desultory, but sides agreed that the UN should take further and more extensive efforts following Cyprus' Presidential elections.

Illegal Immigration

¶6. (C) FM Bakoyannis raised the need for Turkey to better implement the Greece/Turkey "Readmission Protocol." Under the terms of this agreement concluded in 2001, Turkey is obligated to take back certain illegal immigrants who have come to Greece from Turkey. The Greeks claim, however, that of the 23,000 to 25,000 illegal immigrants that have come to Greece from Turkey in the past year, only 1500 have been taken back by Turkey. Babacan responded that Turkey faces a sizeable illegal immigrant population, and it needs EU assistance in managing this problem. Turkey is negotiating a readmission protocol with the EU; Babacan asked for Greek support in concluding this document. Bakoyannis said Greece would do so, but reiterated the need for Turkey to do better in meeting its bilateral commitments to Greece in this area.

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Additional CBMs and Aegean Issues

¶7. (U) Bakoyannis and Babacan announced additional CBMs between the two militaries, specifically:
-- A joint military unit to serve in NATO's NRF;
-- An additional joint military unit to participate in future NATO peace implementation missions;
-- Regular meetings between CHODs and lower echelon staff officers;
-- Exchange of visits between land force commanders deployed on the Greek-Turkish border; and
-- A joint task force with a broad operational mandate to tackle natural disasters and facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid across the border.

¶8. (C) MFA sources said that these CBMs had been agreed "in principle" but that much greater work is needed on the details of the two joint military units.

¶9. (C) Bakoyannis also called for a new emphasis on the "exploratory talks" between Greece and Turkey (Note: The "exploratory talks" are talks on the delineation of the continental shelf. They are currently on their 36th meeting. End note). Bakoyannis also urged Turkey to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Finally, Bakoyannis raised the Turkish Parliament's 1995 decision that any Greek claim to extend its territorial waters from 6 to 12 nautical miles is a "casus belli," reiterating the Greek position that this decision should be withdrawn and is a violation of the UN Charter. Babacan responded by welcoming a greater emphasis on the "exploratory talks," and reiterated the Turkish position that the "exploratory talks" agenda be expanded to include other issues beyond continental shelf delineation (such as territorial waters, national airspace, etc.). Babacan noted that the "casus belli" decision had been taken by the Turkish Parliament in direct response to Greece's ratification of UNCLOS, and did not respond to Bakoyannis' call that it be withdrawn.

¶10. (C) Babacan noted Turkey is discomfited by Greek bilateral understandings with Egypt and Libya related to exclusive economic zones. Turkey prefers that such understandings be reached collectively and are coordinated with all potentially affected states. Bakoyannis responded that Greece has the right to develop bilateral understandings and will continue to do so.

Minority Issues - Istanbul and Thrace

¶11. (C) MFA sources said that this part of the meeting was "artificial with both sides reading prepared points." Bakoyannis raised Greece's long-standing concerns about the status of the ecumenical Patriarchate and asked for the reopening of the Halki Seminary. Babacan responded that Turkey is aware of, and has sympathy for, Greece's concerns, but the political structures of the modern, secular Turkish state restrict Turkey's ability to respond to these concerns. Babacan also noted Turkey hopes to see improvements in the situation of the Turkish minority in Thrace. Bakoyannis responded that the Muslim minority in Thrace enjoys benefits because of Greece's EU membership -- including funds and specific rights. She pointed to recent steps taken by Greece -- including Turkish language education in Greek schools, quotas for Muslim students in Greek universities and technical schools, etc.

Mediterranean Union

¶12. (C) The two Foreign Ministers agreed that the Sarkozy proposal should not be seen as affecting Turkey's EU prospects -- it offers no substitute for Turkey's goal of full membership in the EU. Both also agreed that the proposal requires "greater clarification."

PKK - Terrorism

¶13. (C) Babacan said that the PKK has "affiliate organizations" in Europe that are "propagandizing and securing funds" to support terrorism. He asked for Greece to take measures to help combat this. Contrary to Greek press

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reports, however, Greek MFA sources said that Babacan did not hand over any list of specific organizations of concern to Turkey active in Greece. Bakoyannis said Greece condemns terrorism, and will contribute to the fight against terrorism, consistent with Greece's international law and human rights obligations. On individual cases, she said Greece would take action, provided it had sufficient evidence to do so. She also noted the need for Turkey to improve conditions in Southeast Turkey.

Balkans

¶14. (C) Bakoyannis laid out Greek concerns related to Macedonia's name and expressed hope for "greater Turkish solidarity" on this point. Babacan was noncommittal. The two also exchanged views on Kosovo. Babacan said that he plans to visit Pristina before the end of the year to urge the Kosovar Albanians "not to be hasty" and to urge Belgrade "to be realistic."
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